

## **‘Back to the future.’ Cuban-Russian Relations under Raúl Castro?**

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### **Abstract**

Since Raúl Castro has become the President of Cuba relations between Moscow and Havana have displayed a number of connotations with the halcyon days of Soviet-Cuban relations, which has included Raúl Castro and Dmitry Medvedev travelling to Russia and Cuba twice, respectively and Vladimir Putin visiting the Cuban capital in July 2014. As a result of these events this article will examine the relationship to conclude both whether the bilateral relationship has ‘gone back to the future’ since August 2006, and also if a ‘Raúl doctrine’ similar to the “Putin doctrine,” which has been vital for the relationship, has emerged within Cuban foreign policy.

**Keywords:** Russian-Cuban relations, Raúl Castro

Since Raúl Castro replaced Fidel Castro as Cuban President, first temporarily in August 2006 before in February 2008 becoming the permanent President of Cuba, the relationship between Moscow and Havana appears to be at its most robust since the end of the Cold War with it also displaying a number of connotations with the halcyon days of Soviet-Cuban relations. This has included Raúl Castro and Dmitry Medvedev travelling to Russia and Cuba twice, respectively and Vladimir Putin visiting the Cuban capital in July 2014. Moreover, in the twenty-first century the relationship has become increasingly important for both Russia and Cuba, evidenced by the support which each provides for the

other in various United Nations (UN) forums, including Cuba voting against the UN resolution which condemned the Russian referendum held in the Crimea in early 2014. (www.un.org) Key for the relationship has been the emergence of the “Putin doctrine” in Russian foreign policy in the opening years of the twenty-first century, which wants to return Russia to great power status, desires a multipolar world, is expansionist in nature but is ultimately underpinned by defensive realism (Aron 2013; Grachev, 2006, pp.262-264). A key question which this article is addressing is that as a result of Raúl Castro's close association with the Kremlin since the early years of the Cuban Revolution; have Russian-Cuban relations ‘gone back to the future’ since August 2006? Furthermore, has a similar phenomenon to the “Putin doctrine,” or even a ‘Raúl doctrine’ appeared in Cuban policy, towards Russia? If it has, what possible impact could this have for Havana’s foreign policy in general?

In order to answer these questions, this article will examine the development of Moscow’s foreign policy with particular focus being given to the post-Cold War era and its impact on Russian-Cuban relations. This will allow the emergence of the “Putin doctrine” and its central tenets to be analyzed. The impact of the “Putin doctrine” on Russian-Cuban relations will be examined before attention will be given to Revolutionary Cuba’s foreign policy since 1959. An analysis of the relationship since Raúl Castro’s ascendancy to the Cuban Presidency will then be provided. The final section of this article will focus on Cuban foreign policy since August 2006 and the appearance of a possible “Raúl doctrine.” The article will commence with an examination of the analytical framework which will be used throughout.

### **Analytical Framework**

During the Cold War International Relations thinking was dominated by realism, which posits that sovereign states are the most important actors in the international system,

but that this system is inherently anarchic. As states' pre-eminent goal is their own survival it is thought that their actions centre on their own interests with the outcome being that states frequently strive to maximize their own power. Regarding this Hans Morgenthau has famously written, "...international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power." (Morgenthau 1955, 25) This takes a variety of forms including political control and economic dominance of one country over another, and was most certainly the case with the United States and Soviet Union during the Cold War, but the ideas of realism are traceable to the writings of Thucydides on the Peloponnesian War. However, over time realism has evolved with a number of different strands emerging with Kenneth Waltz in Theory of International Politics detailing the tenets of defensive realism which posits that security is the most important aspect for states and as a result they are not power maximizers, but rather security maximizers. Regarding this he has written, "...self-help is necessarily the principle of action." (Waltz 1979, 111) Conversely, John Mearsheimer has provided the ideas of offensive realism which suggests that states act to maximize their relative power at the expense of other states. (Mearsheimer 2001) At times during the Soviet era both offensive realism and defensive realism were important for Soviet-Cuban relations, but this article will examine whether in the second decade of the twenty-first century realism, but in particular defensive realism, continues to have resonance for both Russian and Cuban foreign policies individually and also therefore Russian-Cuban relations. This will be ascertained by focusing on key themes in the relationship including trade, bilateral agreements, Cuba's Soviet era debt, military links and symbolism such as elite visits and cultural connections. Government speeches, published documents and elite interviews, official statistics, newspaper reports and scholarly works will all be utilized in order to do this.

## **Moscow's Foreign Policy**

Throughout its history a number of issues have underpinned Russia's relationship with the outside world with Stephen White having written that a wish for warm-water harbors and the question regarding the country's role in the world have been of fundamental importance. (White 1991, 179-180) Moreover, Tsygankov and Caldwell believe that some of these including Russian national security, and in turn its foreign policy, have been dominated by a feeling of vulnerability along its borders and an inferiority complex due to a perceived backwardness. These have been key factors in Russian foreign policy, which have transcended the tsarist, Soviet and post-Soviet eras. (Tsygankov 2006, 6; Caldwell 2007, 280-283)

During the Soviet era the ideas of Marxist-Leninism doctrine <sup>1</sup> were one of the cornerstones of the Kremlin's foreign policy. However, due to Russian national security being dominated by the aforementioned inferiority complex and feelings of insecurity along its borders the ideas of defensive realism were also significant. Writing about the Soviet ruling elite Grigor Suny has written of the prominence of realism in their thinking since the time of Lenin. (Grigor Suny 2007, 57)

This was vital for the interest which Moscow took in the Cuban Revolution in the months after January 1959. Cuba's geographical location and relationship with Washington were key for Soviet interest in the Cuban Revolution, which only increased further as Havana's relationship with Washington deteriorated in no small part due to the anti-American nature of the Revolution. (Fursenko and Naftali 1997, 2) Moreover, the timing of its victory at the height of the Cold War, and the changes implemented regarding Soviet foreign policy in the aftermath of Josef Stalin's death, increased Soviet interest in the Developing World. This also meant that the time was right for the Kremlin to acquire an ally in the western

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<sup>1</sup> Marxist-Leninist doctrine posited that a vanguard party was required to lead the working class in the overthrow of capitalism.

hemisphere, especially one in such a geostrategically significant location. The result was that Moscow's relationship with the new regime in Havana demonstrated to the United States that Moscow was now the capital of a global power, which could challenge not just U.S. hegemony in Latin America, but also even Cuba. This is in accordance with Mearsheimer's ideas of offensive realism that states attempt to increase their power at the expense of others.

This provided part of the foundations of Soviet-Cuban relations for the next 30 years, but it came to an abrupt end with the implosion of the Soviet Union in December 1991. Even more fundamentally "...the new Russia had to accommodate itself to a world in which it was no longer a superpower, and in which its economic weakness mattered more than a stockpile of rusting missiles." (White 2004, 215) In this situation Boris Yeltsin's government foreign policy in the early 1990s became much more western orientated, with it appearing that the Liberal Westernizers had won the debate which had raged regarding the Kremlin's foreign policy. (Light 1996, 33-100). On the prominence of the Liberal Westernisers Bobo Lo has written, "During the Yeltsin period, America represented the single greatest external influence on Russian foreign policy." (Lo 2002, 8) This was key to the downturn in Moscow's relationship with Havana which took place in the early to mid-1990s, on which Professor Eugenio Larin, Director of Latin American Studies at the Institute of Cold War History of the Russian Academy of Sciences has written, "In order to improve political ties Washington demanded of B.H. Yeltsin that he must cut ties with Cuba. This course of action dominated the 1990s." (Larin 2007, 164)

However, from the mid-1990s the relationship began to improve, demonstrated in 1996 when bilateral trade turnover was 616,086,000 pesos which made Russia Cuba's chief trading partner, something which had not been expected or predicted in the early 1990s. (Anuario Estadístico, 2000, VI-5-VI-7) A colossal legacy from the Soviet era was important for the trade that was conducted in the early to mid-1990s as very quickly after December

1991 both countries realized that it was easier and cheaper for elements of bilateral trade to continue rather than for either country to buy certain goods on the open market. This was particularly the case with the Russian purchase of sugar and the Cuban purchase of oil. (Vlasov 1993). In addition, the Cuban economic reforms instigated in the aftermath of the disintegration of Soviet-Cuban relations had been designed to help the Revolution survive the loss of its socialist partners by opening up the island's economy to the world market. A side effect of these reforms had been that the preeminent place of Russia in the Cuban economy had been usurped by companies from other countries. In December 2000 while he was in Cuba, Putin commented, "We lost a lot of positions which were a top priority for both countries, and our Russian companies in Cuba have been replaced by Western competitors." (Newman, 2000) A Russian desire to address this was also important for the levels of trade conducted in the final decade of the twentieth century. Moreover, so was a change in Russian foreign policy which took place in the mid-1990s onwards.

The pretext for the change in Russian foreign policy was that many in Russia felt that the Kremlin's western looking foreign policy had not achieved its hoped for goals with many Russians blaming the West and organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for the economic problems which the country continued to endure. (Kanet 2011, 204-206) Anti-western sentiments began to come to prominence in Russian society with Russian nationalism being gravely offended by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) expansion to the east and also over this organization's treatment of their fellow Serbs in the former Yugoslavia. Regarding NATO bombing of Belgrade in March 1999 Yeltsin has described this as "undisguised aggression" (Rossiiskaya gazeta 26 March 1999, 2) and the effect that the Kosovo crisis had for the Russian population, Yeltsin has written, "...the Kosovo crisis increased the anti-Western sentiment in society." (Yeltsin 2000, 271)

The result was an increase in nationalism within Russian politics and in December 1995 Andrei Kozyrev, who had been closely associated with the pro-U.S. foreign policy, was replaced as Foreign Minister by Yevgeny Primakov. Significantly Primakov believed much more in “spheres of influence” than his predecessor which manifested itself in the Kremlin taking much more interest in their “near abroad.”<sup>2</sup> Moscow being much more assertive towards its “near abroad” was one of the key changes in Russian foreign policy that commenced in the mid-1990s.

A second key change was that Moscow wished to reassert itself in international relations having been marginalized for a number of years with the Kremlin desiring a much more multipolar world than the one which had emerged from the Cold War. Russia wishing a much more multipolar world, in conjunction with a Soviet legacy, was fundamental for the upturn in Russian-Cuban relations which took place from the mid-1990s onwards. Moreover, the pretexts listed above were also fundamental for the emergence of what some authors have classed as a “Putin Doctrine” in Russian foreign policy. (Aron 2013: Grachev 2006, pp.262-264) Significantly these same pretexts also resulted in the appearance of what Shevtsova has termed the “Weimar syndrome” or Aron has classed as the “besieged fortress” mentality, which has at its centre the idea that Russia is surrounded by steadily encroaching enemies. (Shevtsova 2015, 2: Aron 2013, 2-3) Both Shevtsova and Aron believe that attempts to counter the humiliation that Russia has suffered due the “Weimar syndrome” and the “besieged fortress” mentality in the post-Cold War period have been used by the Russian government since the year 2000 to garner support for itself and is therefore crucial for its survival. (Shevtsova 2015, 3; Aron 2013, 2) In addition, Zevelev believes that the perceptions which have surfaced in Russia due to the appearance of the “Weimar syndrome” and the “besieged fortress” mentality, in combination with a desire for a greater “Russian world,”

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<sup>2</sup> With regards Moscow’s policy towards its near abroad Skak has even described it as the Kremlin’s “Monroe Doctrine.” (Skak 2011, 138-154)

have resulted in the ideas of realist-statists and the nationalist school of Russian foreign policy merging in the twenty-first century. Realist-statists want Russia to increase its influence in the post-Soviet space, reduce U.S. global power and create a multipolar world. The nationalist school of foreign policy, which Zevlev has split into neo-imperialists and ethnic nationalists, desires that a “buffer zone of post-Soviet protectorates along Russia’s borders” be created. (Zevlev 2014, 2-3)

The result is that since the year 2000 Russian foreign policy in general has become much more assertive, and within the former Soviet Union expansionist, as the Kremlin has strived to return Russia to the status of a great power. This expansionism could suggest both a Soviet revanche and also that offensive realism are key for Russian foreign policy. However, it is the ideas of defensive realism that are fundamental due to the importance of countering the “Weimar syndrome” and the “besieged fortress” mentality for gathering support for the Russian government with this ultimately aiding its survival. Moreover, writing in 2015 Shevtsova has written, “In brief, for the Kremlin, the turn to expansionism is more of a pressure release valve and a way to compensate for its weaknesses in other areas (including the economy), rather than an actual method of territorial acquisition.” (Shevtsova 2015, 3) In addition, Zevlev has stated that defensive realism underpins the thinking of Russian statist. (Zevlev 2014, 2) What can be concluded is that “Putin Doctrine” wants to return Russia to great power status, desires a multipolar world, is expansionist in nature but is ultimately underpinned by defensive realism.

The “Putin doctrine” is vital for Russian foreign policy, but it is not a new phenomenon in the twenty-first century but rather a continuation, at a more pronounced level, of the changes in Moscow’s foreign policy that originated in the mid-1990s highlighted by Primakov replacing Kozyrev as Russian Foreign Minister. They continued under Dmitri



Medvedev's Presidency of Russia, and it has been key to the upturn in Russian-Cuban relations which took place from the mid-1990s onwards.

### **The “Putin Doctrine” and Russian-Cuban Relations**

As stated, Moscow wished to reassert itself in international relations having been marginalized since the implosion of the Soviet Union, and an improved relationship with Cuba demonstrated to Washington that Russia once again had a global outlook and was becoming influential in areas beyond the Europe Asian landmass. In short, the Kremlin wished to “tickle the Americans’ underbelly” with closer relations with Cuba achieving this aim. (Sosnovsky, 1996, 5) Moreover, Russian-U.S. relations **have** deteriorated with Kanet writing in 2010 that: “Over the past several years, the Russians have also pursued a very visible policy of establishing closer ties with states openly critical, even hostile, to the United States and to U.S. interests. This includes the expansion of economic ties with Cuban and Venezuela” (Kanet 2011, 219).

Furthermore, some perceive the decision to keep the Lourdes listening post on the outskirts of Havana open as an attempt to counter the expansion of NATO to the east. By the year 2000 global politics may have been vastly different from the Cold War era, but it appeared that the geostrategic importance of Cuba for the Kremlin was once again significant for the relationship between Havana and Moscow. The expansionist nature of the “Putin doctrine” would appear to be important, but the improvement in relations with Cuba also sated the Russian desire for both great power status and also a multipolar world. Furthermore, defensive realism is key due to, as stated, the importance of defensive realism within the “Putin Doctrine,” which is ultimately designed to amass support for the Russian government and aid its survival.

Moreover, these same features of the “Putin doctrine” are also evident in the impact which the Kremlin’s general increased interest in Latin America in the twenty-first century has had on its bilateral relationship with Cuba. Cuba now enjoys cordial relations with the vast number of countries in the region, and awkward questions could have appeared for Moscow in its attempts to become more involved in Latin America if Russian-Cuban relations had remained at the low level of the immediate aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, as it would have appeared that the Kremlin had abandoned its former Cold War ally. Regarding the importance of Cuba for Russian interest in the region in 2008 Medvedev called Cuba “...one of our key partners in Latin America.” (RIA Novosti 21 November 2008). The Kremlin’s interest in the region was further demonstrated by the inclusion of Latin America in the “Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation” in July 2008. It stated

Russia will seek to establish a strategic partnership with Brazil, broaden its political and economic cooperation with Argentine, Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela and other Latin American and Caribbean countries and their associations relying on the progress achieved in relations with the States of this region in recent years, enhance its interaction with these States within the international organizations, promote export of Russia's high-technology products to Latin American countries and implement joint energy, infrastructure and high-tech projects, inter alia, in accordance with the plans elaborated by the regional integration associations. (Foreign Policy Concept 2008)

Latin America or Cuba had not appeared in previous documents of this nature that had been published since 1992, but they were in “Concept of Russian Foreign Policy” that was approved by Putin on 12 February 2013. (Concept of Russian Foreign Policy 2013) Russian interest was further illustrated in May 2013 when the ambassadors of the countries of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) to Moscow met the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in the Russian capital, with Bruno Rodríguez, Cuban Foreign Minister also being present. (Granma 31 May 2013). In short, the geostrategic importance of

Cuba for Moscow has increased. This is not to suggest that it has returned to the level of the Cold War, but the change in Russian foreign policy that eventually gave rise to the “Putin doctrine,” had been vital for this phenomenon.

As stated previously, Russian-Cuban trade continued in the 1990s due to the aforementioned legacy from the Soviet era and unforeseen consequences of the Cuban economic reforms of the 1990s. However, for a country to have great power status it must have global interests both politically and economically, with trade on a global scale constituting part of the economic aspect of great power status. Russia desired trade with Cuba, evidenced both during Putin’s trip to the island in December 2000 when an exchange deal for 2001 to 2005 involving Russian oil, machinery and chemicals being exchanged for Cuban sugar, rum, medicines and medical equipment was signed (Moscow Interfax 22 March 2001), and also in March 2003 when Leonid Reyman, Russian Minister of Communication and Information Technology, commented, “We are worried about a slowdown in the bilateral trade and economic relations and we would like to reverse the process with the Cuban side.” (Moscow ITAR-TASS 25 March 2003) An increase in bilateral trade with Cuba demonstrated Russia trading on a global scale which was an important element in the Russian wish to strive for great power status.

Russia’s desire to reassert itself in international relations displays key elements of the “Putin doctrine;” a wish to return Russia to great power status and a desire for a multipolar world with the Kremlin’s foreign policy appearing to be expansionist. This could suggest that offensive realism is significant. However, and conversely, it is defensive realism that is key due to its significance within the “Putin doctrine” and the role this plays in garnering support for the Russian regime. Therefore, the ideas which constitute the “Putin doctrine;” the desire to return Russia to great power status, wish for a multipolar world, an expansionist foreign

policy ultimately underpinned by defensive realism have all been crucial for Moscow's relationship with Havana in the twenty-first century.

### **Theories of Cuba Foreign Policy**

In *Cuba's Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World* Michael Erisman has detailed five main concepts that he believes have been prominent in Cuba's foreign policy since January 1959. These are the ideas of the revolutionary crusade, the super-client/surrogate thesis, Fidelista personalismo, dependency and counter dependency and realist pragmatism. These will all be examined in turn. During the Cold War the ideas of Cuban foreign policy being dominated by a revolutionary crusade and the super-client/surrogate thesis attracted much attention. Although this is the case, Erisman has written that Havana's foreign policy was always much more complex and nuanced than to be dominated by just one of these two concepts. Moreover, both have receded in importance since the end of the Cold War, despite the continuing significance of internationalism within the island's foreign policy. (Erisman 2000, 3 & 33-36)

Furthermore, since August 2006 a waning in the importance of Fidelista personalismo, the specific Cuban version of the Great Man Theory, has also taken place.<sup>3</sup> As a result of his force of character and personality Fidel Castro dominated Cuban political life for more than 50 years, but even before 2006 and his deteriorating health, Erisman has argued Cuban politics were never Fidel's personal fiefdom in which he could do as he pleased. From the 1970s the revolution became increasingly institutionalized, with the Communist Party of Cuba (PCC) and organizations such as the National Assembly and the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC) all being significant in the Cuban decision making process. (Erisman 2000,

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<sup>3</sup> At times throughout history a country's political process has been controlled by an individual due to their complete domination of that country. Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin are often seen in this manner. As a result, the Great Man Theory ignores the more formal networks of the foreign policy making process and focuses instead on the idiosyncrasies of the particular individual involved.

30-33; Montaner 1989) In addition, the Cuban Armed Forces (FAR) were also part of this process with Brian Latell writing, “The FAR have always been the most important institution in revolutionary Cuba.” (Latell 2003, 7)

Erisman has also stated that dependency and counter dependency have been prevalent in Havana’s foreign policy since 1959. Throughout its history Cuba has been dominated by outside powers, firstly Spain and then from the 1890s until 1959 the United States, with some arguing that after the Revolution dependency on the United States was merely replaced by dependency on the Soviet Union. (Erisman 2000, 43-47) Although this is the case, Erisman has written that after 1959 what actually materialized was counter dependency as throughout the existence of Soviet-Cuban relations Havana continually strove to reduce dependency on the Kremlin, which was in no small part due to the importance of nationalism within the Revolution. (Erisman 2000, 43-47)

As detailed, realism has been key for Moscow’s foreign policy since the time of the Russian Revolution and this is repeated with regards Cuban foreign policy since January 1959. Realism, or realist pragmatism, is fundamental to understanding the actions of the Cuban ruling elite since January 1959 as the survival of the revolution has always been the most important consideration in the government decision making process with foreign policy being no different. This returns to the ideas of defensive realism, and in conjunction with counter dependency and nationalism, has underpinned Havana’s relationship with Moscow since its inception in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Realist pragmatism was infamously demonstrated in August 1968 when the Cuban government backed the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia. This may have been contrary to world opinion, but it signalled a rapprochement with the Kremlin after Soviet-Cuban relations had been strained in the mid to late 1960s as a result of both Havana’s radical internal policies, highlighted by the attempts to produce the “new man” who worked for the

betterment of society rather than personal accolade, and also external policies which attempted to spark revolutions throughout the Developing World, being vastly different from Moscow's more cautious approach. However, by the summer of 1968 Cuba's radicalism had begun to recede due to a failure of both Havana's radical internal and external policies outlined above to produce the desired results which had been graphically illustrated by Ernesto "Che" Guevara's death in October 1967. Their failure also placed the Revolution in jeopardy as the island's economy struggled to survive the impact of this radicalism and its foreign policy was left in tatters. An improved relationship with the Kremlin would help safeguard the Revolution both economically and politically. (Erisman 2000, 25-26; Levesque 1978, 147-149; González 1977, 3)

### **Russian-Cuban Relations under Raúl Castro's Presidency**

This article is addressing the questions of both whether a 'Raúl doctrine' similar to the "Putin doctrine" has emerged in Cuban foreign policy since Raúl Castro's ascendancy to the Cuban Presidency, and also if the relationship between Moscow and Havana has 'gone back to the future' since August 2006. A number of events and processes will be examined to ascertain whether Russian-Cuban relations have actually 'gone back to the future.'

#### **Trade**

Bilateral trade has once again become important in the relationship despite the levels of trade conducted having since fallen since 1996, when as stated Russia was once again Cuba's chief trading partner. In addition, Russia has been replaced in importance in the island's economy by Canada and Spain before the year 2000 and after this by China and Venezuela. By the year 2000 bilateral Russian-Cuban trade turnover was 435,877,000 pesos with this figure falling below 200 million pesos in the years from 2003 to 2005. However, since 2005,

the last full calendar year in which Fidel Castro was Cuban President, bilateral Russian-Cuban trade has increased, with 341,228,000 pesos worth of trade being conducted in 2012, which made Russia the island's ninth most important trading partner. (Anuario Estadístico 2012, 8.4) In addition, both countries show a desire for trade to increase with in December 2010 an inter-parliamentary agreement to boost bilateral trade being signed by Boris Gryzlov, speaker of the Russian State Duma, and Ricardo Alarcon, President of the National Assembly (RIA Novosti 31 December 2010). Moreover, in February 2013 while in Cuba Dmitiri Medvedev stated "Regrettably, trade between Russia and Cuba is not high as it should be... There are good investment plans, and investment is developing despite its small volume. I am sure it will grow and our cooperation will expand to many new areas." (Medvedev 2013)

This wish for an increase in bilateral trade was reiterated by Valentina Matvienko, President of the Council of Federations of the Russian Federation's Federal Assembly, in an interview with *Granma* during her trip to Cuba in May 2013. In this she stated

Despite the fact that trade relations have grown recently, they still do not reflect the potential and possibilities of our two countries. The value of our trade exchange is approaching \$270 million, according to 2012 figures, which is insufficient. We are currently negotiating a broad range of projects relating to energy, and Russian companies such as Zarubezhneft are actively involved in oil prospecting in Cuban waters, and this work is going to continue (Granma 22 May 2013).<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the topic of bilateral trade also dominated talks between Raúl Castro and Dmitry Rogozin, Russian Vice President, when he visited Havana in December 2014. (Juventud Rebelde 20 December 2014)

However, levels of bilateral trade have not increased significantly since August 2006. As stated, bilateral trade has risen since 2005, but not only does it remain at a low level, but it has also not returned to the levels of the 1990s when as stated in 1996 Russia was Cuba's

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<sup>4</sup>On 23 August 2013 Zarubezhneft started drilling in the on-shore Boca de Jaruco field which is east of Havana. Cuba Standard.com, 26 August 2013.

chief trading partner. (Anuario Estadístico 2012, 8.4), In addition, a desire for trade to increase has been evident for some time before Raúl's ascendancy to the Cuban Presidency, demonstrated by both the aforementioned agreement signed during Putin's December 2000 trip to the island and also Leonid Reyman's, Russian Minister of Communication and Information Technology, previously cited quote from March 2003 when he spoke of the Russian hope for bilateral trade with Cuba to increase. (Moscow ITAR-TASS 25 March 2003)

### Agreements

In addition, agreements on a variety of different topics have been signed, including in April 2013 a joint project between the two countries to build a new international airport at San Antonio de los Baños, 30 kilometres from the Cuban capital, scheduled to be completed by the year 2020. (Correo del Orinoco 19 April 2013) Moreover, in February 2013 during Medvedev's trip to Cuba, Moscow and Havana signed a number of agreements including one for the Cuban purchase of Ilyushin aircraft and on increasing cooperation between the two countries. During this visit Medvedev also spoke of a desire to increase scientific links, especially with regards Cuba's biotechnology industry. (Medvedev, 2013) Also during Medvedev's trip in February 2013 an agreement regarding Cuba's debt accumulated during the Soviet era was signed, which entailed a partial write-off of the debt with the remainder being refinanced over a 10-year period. (Medvedev, 2013) However, in July 2014 this agreement was superseded by the one signed while Putin was in Cuba which wrote off 90% of the island's debt to Moscow, with the remaining 10% being 'paid' with Russian investments in the Cuba economy. (Granma 12 July 2014, 5)

Moreover, agreements have also been signed on military assistance. In May 2013 when Russian Army General Valeri Gerasimov was in Cuba he confirmed that military



cooperation between Russia and Cuba would continue. Significantly, Alexandr Fomín, Vice-President of the Russian Federal Service of Military and Technological Cooperation, stated that this would be of a modest level and that “We will not supply Cuba with the most modern armaments, but rather it will be of level to maintain Cuban defense.” (eldiario.es 14 May 2013) This would be linked to the Soviet era hardware that Cuba still possesses. Moreover, in August 2013 a Russian naval task force led by the Moskva missile cruiser visited Havana. (RIA Novosti 4 August 2013)

Again as with bilateral trade, agreements on other topics have also been signed between Moscow and Havana throughout the post-Cold War period and did not commence in August 2006 when Raúl Castro became Cuban President. An agreement regarding Russian military hardware was signed as early as November 1994 when Colonel General M. Kolesnikov, Russian Chief of General Staff, was in Havana. This agreement was with regards Russian payment for their continuing use of the Lourdes listening post in the 1990s. Specifically the agreement stated that Cuba would receive \$200m a year for the use of this facility and that it would be paid in kind with part of this consisting of spare parts for equipment which included military equipment. (Sevodnya 12 November 1994, 2) Moreover, this also highlights the continuation of military links throughout the post-Soviet era. Similarly the agreement signed while Putin was in Cuba in December 2000 illustrated Russian interest in the Cuban biotechnology existing for some time. (Moscow Interfax 22 March 2001) In addition, an agreement regarding Cuba’s Soviet era debt had been signed in September 2005, when Fidel Castro was still Cuban President, which deferred its payment. (ITARR-TASS News Agency September 15 2005.)

## Symbolism

In January 2009 Raúl Castro made his first official visit to Moscow in more than 20 years, with the frequency of Raúl's visits to the Russian capital since 1959 being indicative of the bilateral relationship in general. During the Soviet period Raúl made 23 official visits to Moscow, but the lack of such trips throughout the 1990s before their recommencement in the twenty-first century signified the sudden and dramatic downturn in the relationship in the immediate aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union before their subsequent improvement. (Mamedov & Dalmau 2004, 628-658) Moreover, at other times since becoming Cuban President, Raúl's speeches and actions have had connotations with the relationship's Soviet past. During his closing speech to the 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Cuban Communist Party (PCC) on 19 April 2011, the 51<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Raúl thanked the Soviet Union for their aid and assistance during the infancy of the Revolution when he commented, "It is appropriate on a day like today to remember that without the help of the peoples who made up that immense country, especially the Russian people, the Revolution would not have been able to survive in those initial years facing growing and continuous imperialist attacks and for this reason we are eternally grateful to them (*Granma* 21 April 2011). This mirrors what he said 50 years previously in a speech to mark the eighth anniversary of the attack on the Moncada barracks. In his 1961 speech he talked about the Soviet Union becoming stronger and "If this were not so, if we had not been able to count on the aid of these forces, imperialism would have made our people pay with an endless river of blood for having the audacity to rise up against capitalism." (Castro 1961, 19) Furthermore, during his July 2012 trip to Moscow the Cuban Premier did not only place a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Red Square, but also visited the Lenin Mausoleum, with this certainly having connotations to Soviet era protocol. (Puig 12 July 2012)

However, visits by the ruling elites to each other's countries did not start with Raúl Castro becoming Cuban President because as previously stated Putin visited the island in December 2000. Yevgeny Primakov, then Russian Foreign Minister, travelled the island as early as the spring of 1996. This trip was reciprocated in March 1998 when Roberto Robaina, the Cuban Foreign Minister, visited Moscow with these visits by the two countries' respective Foreign Ministers marking the upturn in Russian-Cuban relations that commenced in the mid-1990s as such trips by the countries' ruling elites had been missing since the implosion of the Soviet Union. (Khachaturov 1996). High level visits of the nature of those detailed above have continued since August 2006.

Since Raúl has become President of Cuba an increase in activity in the field of culture has occurred. In February 2010 Russia was the "guest of honor" at the Havana International Book Fair which was visited by Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister, during a trip to the island. In the aftermath of this, and with the aid of the Russian "Mir" Fund, a permanent Russian exhibition has been opened in the José Martí National Library in the Cuban capital. In October 2012 the Moscow theatre company "Et Cetera" conducted performances in Havana during a four-day stay in the Cuban Capital. (*Edicion de la Embajada*, 2012, 20) Moreover, in early 2008 the Our Lady of Kazan Russian Orthodox Cathedral was opened in Havana, which Medvedev visited during his November 2008 trip to Cuba. (*Edicion de la Embajada* 2010, 28)

In addition, the number of Russians holidaying in Cuba has steadily risen in the final years of the opening decade of the twenty-first century. In 2003 10,653 Russians vacationed in Cuba increasing to 78,472 in 2011. This figure is only exceeded by tourists from another six countries making Russia an important source of tourists for Cuba. (*Anuario Estadístico* 2012, 15.3). Moreover, it also means that since the end of Soviet-Cuban relations, the largest number of Russians are now travelling to Cuba. Travel to the Caribbean island is made easier

for Russians as they do not require entry visas, but the significance which Cuba attaches to Russian tourists is highlighted by the Official Portal of Tourism, Cubatravel.cu, having only four language options, one of which is Russian.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Cuba's desire to increase the number of Russians vacationing on the island was further demonstrated by their presence at the Seventh International Tourist fair held in March 2012 in Moscow. (Rondón, 2012)

What is also noticeable in the period since Raúl has become the President of Cuba is that both governments have started to make increasing reference to the longevity of the relationship between Moscow and Havana. Moreover, this is not just to the era of Soviet-Cuban relations from 1959 to 1991, but even to the relationship that existed before the Cuban Revolution.

(Bain 2013) This was most clearly demonstrated in January 2009 when Raúl Castro was in Moscow he visited the permanent exhibition at the Museum of the Great Patriotic War to Jorge and Aldo Vivo and Enrique Vilar who fought for the Red Army during World War 2. During this trip in an interview with the Russian journal *America Latina*, Raúl called the bilateral relationship "magnificent" and that the two countries are "inextricably" linked.

(Castro 2009) In July 2012 when the Cuban Premier was again in Moscow, Putin commented, "Cuba is not only an old ally, but remains a great friend." He continued, "...all that we have achieved during these past years, it's our common treasure." (Puig, 12 July 2012) Dmitiri Medvedev echoed these sentiments during his February 2013 visit to Cuba when during an interview with *Prensa Latina* he commented, "Our relations with Cuba rest on a formidable basis that had been laid previously. I think it is essential not to squander our past achievements but to build on them." (Medvedev, 2013) This is highly significant as it illustrates both the long-standing nature of the bilateral relationship, and also the desire for it to continue.

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<sup>5</sup> The other language options are Spanish, English and German.  
<http://www.cubatravel.cu/client/home/index.php> (20 Aug. 2007).

The re-conceptualization of the relationship which is currently taking place in both countries is also significant as it is an attempt to highlight the longevity of the relationship between Moscow and Havana to their respective populations. This re-conceptualization in conjunction with the cultural links listed above and the numbers of Russians visiting Cuba would suggest that since August 2006 Cuban-Russian relations have ‘gone back to the future.’ However, this is not the case, because these cultural links and numbers of Russians travelling to Cuba are in fact a manifestation of the robust nature of the contemporary bilateral relationship, with as stated the “Putin doctrine” being important. However, as detailed, the origins of the “Putin doctrine” are traceable to the mid-1990s with the relationship between Moscow and Havana subsequently improving. Moreover, no demonstrable change in the relationship has taken place with regards trade, agreements or symbolism since Raúl Castro became Cuban President.

### **A ‘Raúl doctrine’?**

In addition to ascertaining whether Russian-Cuban relations have gone ‘gone back to the future’ since August 2006 this article is also attempting to conclude if a ‘Raúl doctrine’ similar to the “Putin doctrine” has emerged during Raúl Castro’s Presidency. It could be thought that a ‘Raúl doctrine’ may materialize due to Raúl Castro’s close association with the Moscow since the early years of the Cuban Revolution. In short, are the central tenets of the “Putin doctrine;” a return to great power status, desire for a multipolar world, an expansionist foreign policy underpinned by defensive realism evident in Cuban foreign policy. If they are, this could have a number of repercussions with the island's foreign policy becoming increasingly radical and the FAR having a much more international presence as it did during the Cold War. This is not to suggest that the FAR would bestride the Developing World as it did in the 1970s and 1980s, but the posturing of a great power could return. On this Jorge

Domínguez has written ‘For many years,..., relatively weak Cuba behaved as if it were a major power.’ (Domínguez, 1997, 52) Cuba once again could become a protagonist in the Developing World. Furthermore, if a ‘Raúl doctrine’ materialized this could lead to a deterioration in relations with the West due to the impact of the central tenets of the “Putin doctrine” on the relationship between Moscow and Washington, evidenced throughout 2014 in the situation in the Crimea and Ukraine.

In addition, this could also suggest that a number of the paradigms of Cuban foreign policy that were evident during the Soviet era, and were detailed previously, have returned to prominence. However, this is not the case with the principles of the surrogate/superclient thesis as these have been confined to history. Since Raúl’s ascendancy to the Cuban Premiership Havana is most certainly not acting on Russia’s bequest in the Developing World. Furthermore, international relations are fundamentally different in the twenty-first century when compared to the Cold War, and due to this and the pragmatism within the Cuban ruling elite, the island simply could not afford to undertake expansive foreign policy endeavors.

As stated, since August 2006 Russian-Cuban relations have not ‘gone back to the future’ with Cuba’s Russia policy also having not displayed any significant change since Raúl replaced Fidel as the President of Cuba. As argued the origins of the “Putin doctrine” can be dated to the changes in Russian foreign policy that originated in the mid-1990s. This is repeated with regards Cuban policy towards its bilateral relationship with Moscow. Havana’s foreign policy underwent fundamental change in the early 1990s as Cuba faced a new world order without its socialist partners, but with hostility continuing to emanate from Washington. Regarding this, John Kirk has stated, ‘The greatest single task in terms of foreign policy facing the Cuban government in the early 1990s, however, was how to keep the traditional (self-declared) enemy at bay.’ (Kirk, 2006, 334) Erisman has written that a diversification of

the island's foreign policy, that aimed to create greater economic and political space, has achieved this. (Erisman 2006, 3-5) Moreover, Julie Feinsilver has written: "...that Cuba's foreign policy initiatives have been geared toward ensuring Cuba's security in an adverse geopolitical situation through support of progressive governments and the creation of a Third World constituency, to gain not just diplomatic support in international organisations but also economic or trade benefits." (Feinsilver, 1993, 13)

Specifically Jorge Domínguez has written that Cuba

...designed four strategies to cope with the United States.

1. It made a neorealist diagnosis of the post-1990 international system, designing a foreign policy in the expectation that other governments would balance U.S. power as it pertained to Cuba. It drew on its legacy of deterring the United States effectively. It built on its long experience as an activist multilateralist to enlist international support.
2. It designed an international strategy to diversify political risk in its international economic relations. Unlike in its past, it would seek to avoid concentrating its international economic partnerships on one or a few countries.
3. It would actively seek instances of cooperation with the United States, especially on shared security interests, to address U.S. concerns and build some support within U.S. military and coast guard services.
4. It would exercise "soft power," promoting internationally the attractive qualities of Cuban society in order to develop a constituency abroad, especially in the United States, friendly to Cuba and its people (Domínguez, 2008, 203)

These strategies detailed above by Dominguez, Erisman and Feinsilver may have become evident in Cuban foreign policy from the 1990s onwards, but crucially a desire to counter forms of dependency appearing underpinned by the principles of defensive realism and realist pragmatism remained prevalent in Cuban foreign policy. The ultimate goal was the survival of the Revolution, which had been questioned by the upheaval in the international system which occurred with the end of the Cold War.

The desire for a "constituency abroad" demonstrates the central tenets of defensive realism as this benefitted the Revolution in the face of continuing hostility from the United States in the post-Cold War period until the first tentative steps towards a normalization process between Havana and Washington began in December 2014. The Russian Federation

may not constitute part of the Third or Developing World, but the upturn in Russian-Cuban relations certainly did not go against the desire for a “constituency abroad” with Moscow significantly also being able to provide important backing for the Cuban regime in various UN forums. From 1995 onwards the Kremlin has voted with Cuba at the Conventions on Human Rights held in Geneva when this had not been the case in the years from 1992 to 1995. (Granma 8 September 1992, 3-6; Izvestia 9 March 1992, 7; Izvestia 12 March 1993) In addition, Moscow has continuously criticized the U.S. embargo against the island, evidenced during Konstantin Kosachev’s, chairman for the Russian Senate’s Foreign Affairs Committee, trip to Cuba in March 2015. (Pagliery 2015) Cuba has reciprocated this support within the UN evidenced on 27 March 2014 when Cuba was one of 11 countries to vote against the UN resolution condemning the Russian referendum held in the Crimea. (www.un.org) Moreover, Havana and Moscow have a shared dislike of the unipolar nature of the international relations that emerged in the 1990s.

With regards bilateral trade defensive realism and realist pragmatism are evident in the Cuban wish to diversify its markets. In the 1990s Cuba needed to do this to survive the loss of its socialist trading partners, with this being undoubtedly successful as it helped the Cuban economy recover from its nadir of 1993 when the island’s total global trade was a mere 3.3 billion pesos. By the year 2000 this had increased to 6.5 billion pesos, before rising to 9.7 billion pesos in 2005 and 19.9 billion pesos in 2011. (*Anuario Estadístico* 2011, 8.4) However, in the twenty-first century Havana has become increasingly reliant on bilateral trade with Caracas. In 2006 trade with Venezuela comprised 21.3% of Cuba’s total global trade with this rising to 27.3% in 2008 and to 41.7% in 2011. It could appear that the Cuban Revolution was displaying forms of dependency on Hugo Chavez’s Bolivarian Revolution, which is given more credence by Cuban-Venezuelan trade being dominated by the Cuban import of Venezuelan goods. In 2006 bilateral trade consisted of 84.5% of Venezuelan



exports, with the figures for 2008 and 2011 being 91.5% and 70.8%, respectively. (Anuario Estadístico 2012, 8.6)

The result is that the Cuban wish to increase trade with Russia can be perceived as an attempt to diversify its markets which would have the outcome of tempering possible economic reliance on Venezuela. This is not to suggest that Cuban-Venezuelan relations have the same characteristics as Soviet-Cuban relations had, but with uncertainty surrounding Havana's relationship with Caracas after Hugo Chavez's death in January 2013 this desire to diversify its markets may ultimately prove somewhat astute. Moreover, it returns to the Cuban Revolutionary elite's historical wish to avoid forms of dependency and the principles of defensive realism and realist pragmatism.

In addition, this desire to avoid forms of dependency appearing, underpinned by defensive realism and realist pragmatism are repeated with regards tourism as Cuba is heavily reliant on Canadian tourists. In the first six months of 2013 48.9% of tourists entering Cuba originated from Canada. (Turismo internacional 2013, 5) Cuba trying to attract Russian tourists to the island can be perceived as Cuban attempts to diversify the source of where tourists visiting the island originate from as this would safeguard the Cuban economy from the effects of a potential fall in the number of Canadians vacationing on the island.

In sum, the principles that underpin Russian-Cuban relations have remained the same since the mid-1990s onwards. No demonstrable change has occurred in Cuba's policies towards Russia since August 2006 under Raúl's Presidency, negating the emergence of a 'Raúl doctrine'. Cuban foreign policy does display the desire for a multipolar world with defensive realism also being of essential importance. These are key aspects of the "Putin doctrine," but both have been evident within Cuban foreign policy for some time. Moreover, the Cuban ruling elite's strict adherence to the principles of realist pragmatism has been fundamental for the relationship since the inception of relations between Moscow and

Havana in the late 1950s and early 1960s, with this continuing in both the post-Soviet period and also since August 2006.

In his book, *Raúl Castro and Cuba. A Military Story*, Hal Klepak stated: "...Raúl has been found to be a reformer when he believes that it is time for reform of the Revolution in order to move forward, and has been found to be a conservative when it is time to dig in and hold the line in the face of threats to the survival of the Revolution (Klepak 2012, p.104). This would appear to be a succinct summation of the principles of realist pragmatism, which Raúl has displayed throughout the Revolutionary period. This was demonstrated in the mid-1980s with the introduction of the System of Enterprise Perfection (SPE), which was implemented in an attempt to offset the negative impact on the island of the reforms instigated in the Soviet Union by Mikhail Gorbachev, with Raúl and the FAR being key for this. (Klepak 2012, 53) As a result, since August 2006 Raúl has displayed the same principles in his decision-making regarding relations with Moscow as he has throughout his political career since January 1959. The Cuban elite in general have repeated this throughout the duration of the island's relationship with the Kremlin, which is despite appearances that could suggest that Russian-Cuban relations have 'gone back to the future' under his Presidency. In sum, under the Presidency of Raúl Castro attempts to avoid forms of dependency remain prevalent in Cuban foreign policy which continues to be underpinned by the principles of defensive realism and realist pragmatism.

## **Conclusions**

This article set out to address a number of questions relating to both Cuban foreign policy in general and Russian-Cuban relations specifically since August 2006. Appearances could suggest that Russian-Cuban relations have gone 'back to the future' and that a 'Raúl doctrine' similar to the "Putin doctrine" has emerged, because in the second decade of the

twentieth century the relationship is at its most robust since the end of Soviet-Cuban relations.

However, neither a 'Raúl doctrine' has appeared with regards either Cuban foreign policy in general, Russian-Cuban relations specifically nor has the relationship between Moscow and Havana gone 'back to the future.' Fundamental for this is that in the twenty-first century defensive realism remains key in the decision-making processes in both Moscow and Havana. The "Putin Doctrine" wants to return Russia to great power status, desires a multipolar world, is expansionist in nature but is ultimately underpinned by defensive realism due the role this plays in garnering support for the Russian regime. The "Putin doctrine" is vital for Russian foreign policy in general and Russian-Cuban relations specifically, but it is not a new phenomenon but rather a continuation of the changes in Moscow's foreign policy that originated in the mid-1990s. Furthermore, this is repeated with regards Cuba as no significant change in Havana's policies towards Moscow has taken place since August 2006. Once again they are continuation of the changes in Cuban foreign policy that took place in the early to mid-1990s. What remains at the core of Cuban foreign policy is the desire to counter forms of dependency appearing with defensive realism and realist pragmatism being fundamental.

This is important in understanding both the bilateral relationship individually and also Cuban foreign policy in general. Contemporary Russian-U.S. relations have deteriorated in no small part due to the appearance of the "Putin doctrine." The fact that Cuban foreign policy remains underpinned by realist pragmatism and that a 'Raúl doctrine' similar to the "Putin doctrine" has not appeared is of critical importance, because if it had, it is highly likely that a similar scenario to Russian-U.S. relations would have materialized and simply this would have prevented the historic events and announcements of 17 December 2014 which heralded the first tentative steps of a normalization process between Havana and Washington.

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